THE DEADLY FEAST

Even wily parrots risk their lives for the gentle Aushadha Kumar, a shining example of right thinking and right living described in the Buddhist Jataka tales. Scheming rivals, foolish rulers and wicked courtiers leave him undaunted. He can organise King Vaideha's security, a network of spies and a royal wedding with equal flair. So, when a deadly plot is revealed, it is Aushadha who swings into action...

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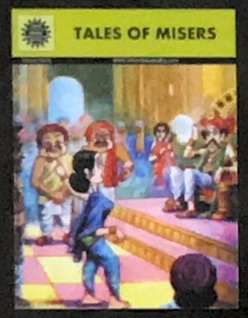

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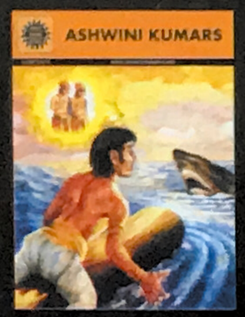

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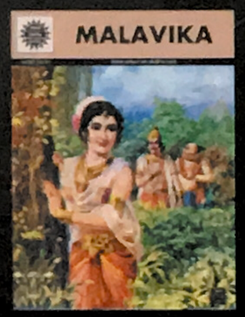

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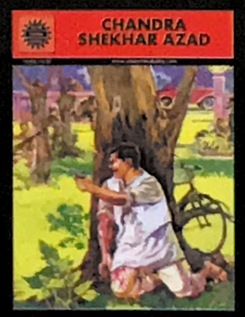

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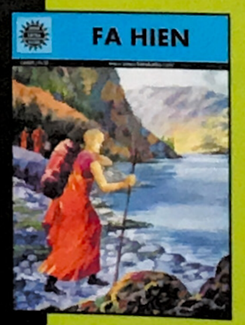

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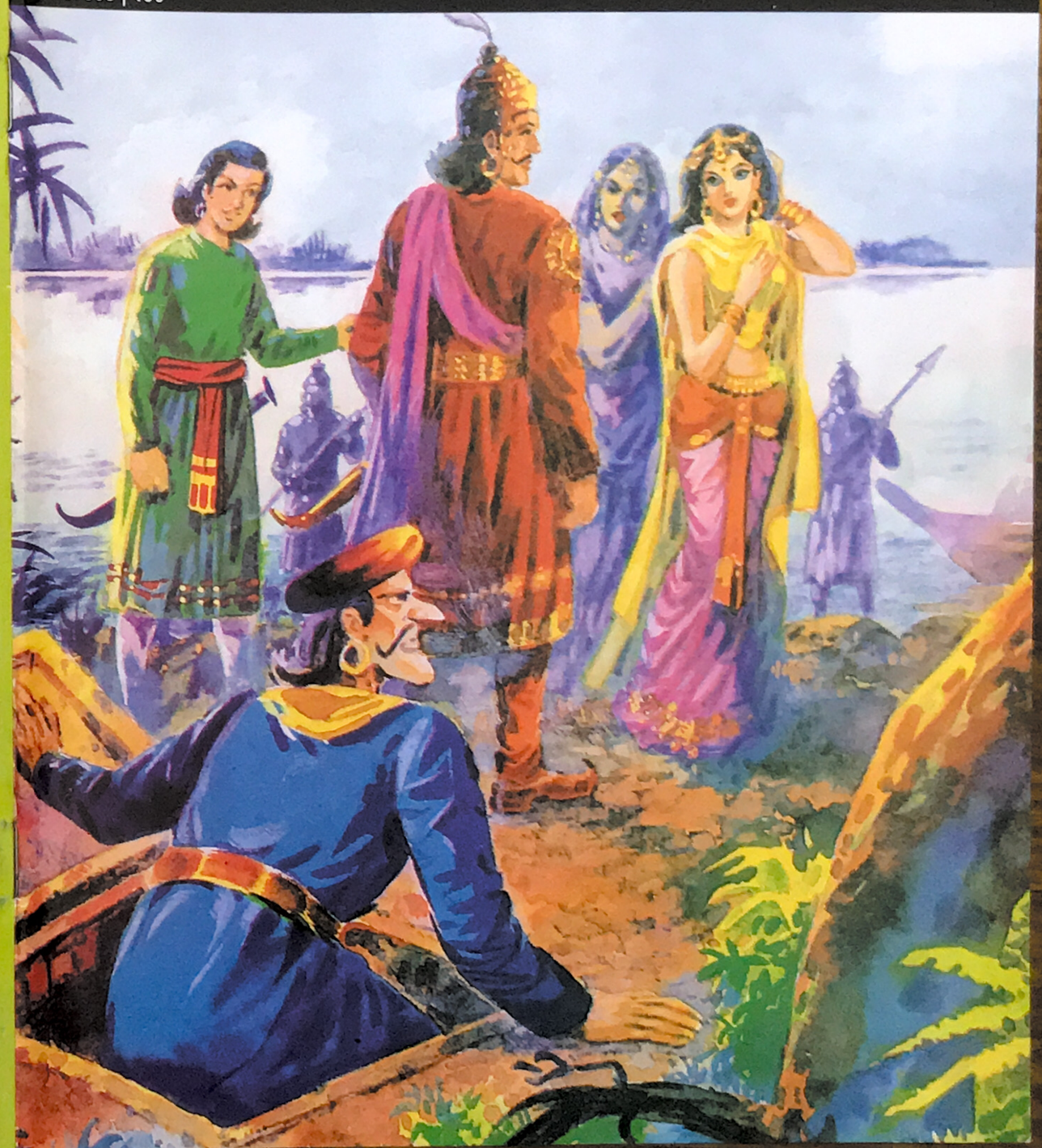


THE DEADLY FEAST

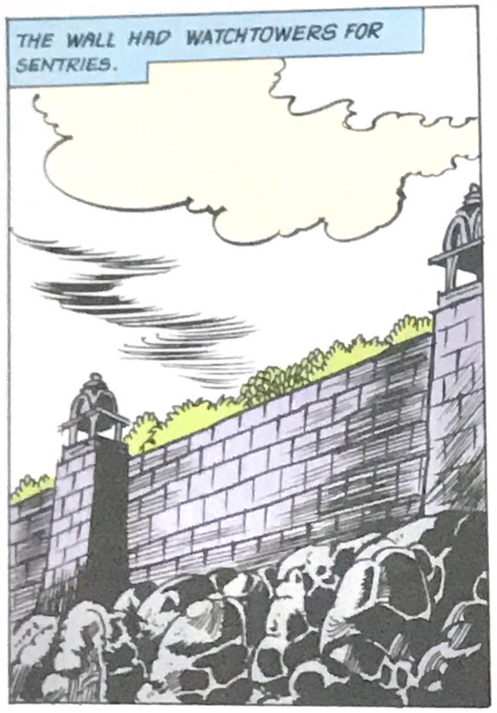
AUSHADHA KUMAR WAS A REINCARNATION OF BODHISATTVA. DAZZLED BY HIS INTELLECTUAL FEATS, VAIDEHA, KING OF VIDEHA ADOPTED HIM AND BROUGHT HIM UP.

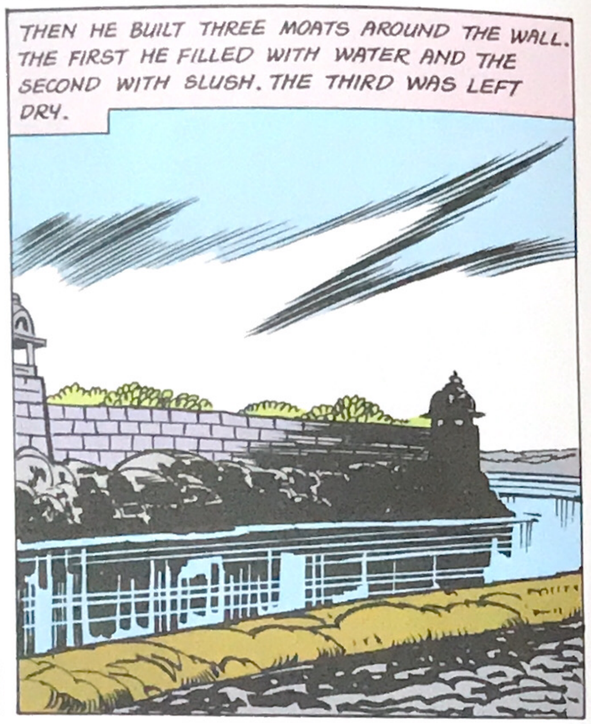
SOON THE KING WAS SO IMPRESSED BY AUSHADHA KUMAR'S WISDOM THAT HE APPOINTED HIM HIS CHIEF MINISTER.

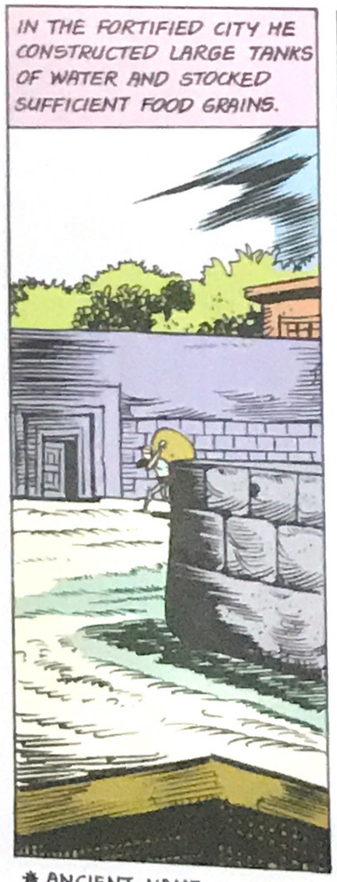
MAHARAJ VAIDEHA, WE MUST FORTIFY OUR CAPITAL TO PREPARE FOR ANY EMERGENCY.

DO WHAT YOU THINK APPROPRIATE, AUSHADHA.

AUSHADHA MADE ELABORATE ARRANGEMENTS TO PROTECT MITHILA, THE CAPITAL, FROM INVADERS. FIRST HE BUILT A LARGE WALL.



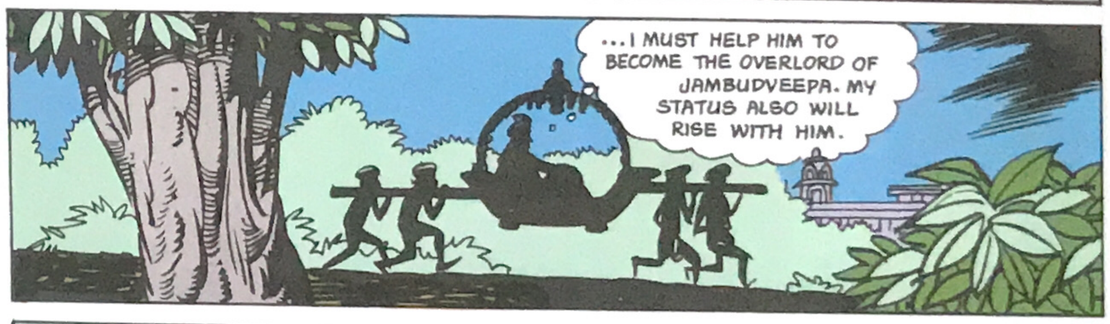


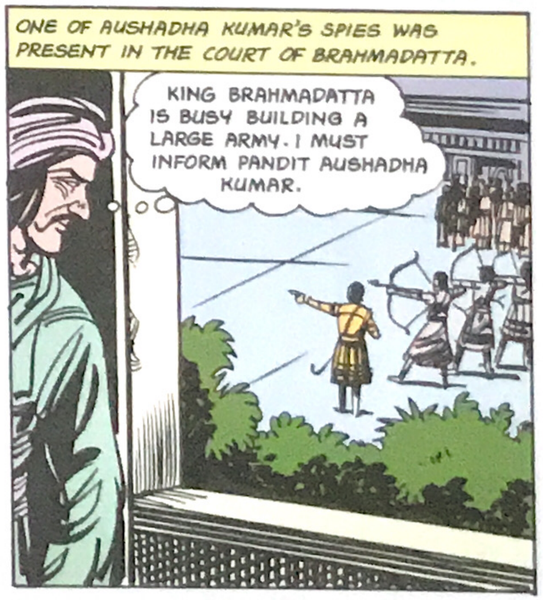


THEN HE SELECTED A HUNDRED FAITHFUL WARRIORS AND SENT THEM TO THE HUNDRED KINGDOMS OF JAMBUDVEEPA *
WIN THE CONFIDENCE OF THE KINGS BUT DO NOT REVEAL YOUR REAL IDENTITY...

* ANCIENT NAME OF INDIA

WHILE AUSHADHA WAS MAKING ARRANGEMENTS TO PROTECT THE KINGDOM OF VIDEHA, KEVATTA, THE MINISTER OF PANCHALA WAS PLANNING TO EXPAND THE DOMAIN OF HIS KING, BRAHMADATTA.
KING BRAHMADATTA IS VERY GENEROUS TO ME...




ONE OF AUSHADHA KUMAR'S SPIES WAS PRESENT IN THE COURT OF BRAHMADATTA.
KING BRAHMADATTA IS BUSY BUILDING A LARGE ARMY. I MUST INFORM PANDIT AUSHADHA KUMAR.

KING BRAHMADATTA IS UPTO SOMETHING...

SOON, THE LETTER REACHED AUSHADHA KUMAR.

...BUT I HAVE NO MEANS OF KNOWING WHAT HIS EXACT PLANS ARE.

WELL, I HAVE THE MEANS TO KNOW.

IT IS TIME FOR MY PARROT TO ACT.

AUSHADHA KUMAR KNEW THE LANGUAGE OF BIRDS.

FLY TO PANCHALA, MY PET, AND FIND OUT THE PLANS OF BRAHMADATTA FOR ME.

AS YOU WISH, PANDIT.

SOON THE PARROT REACHED PANCHALA...

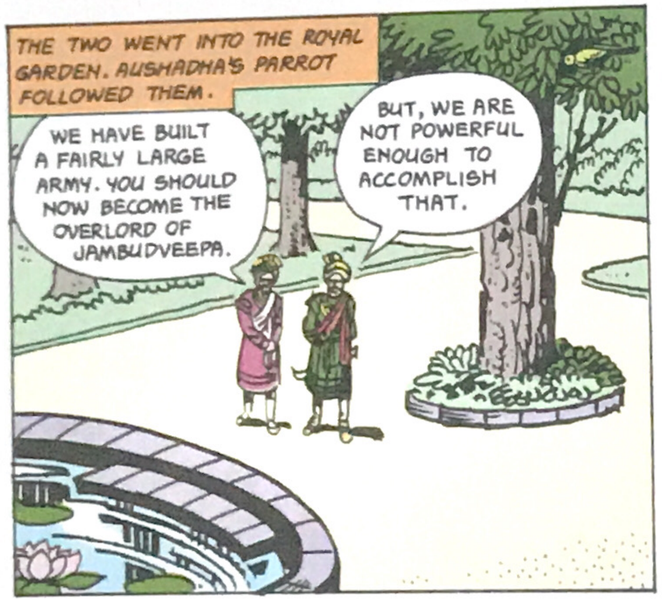
...AND ALIGHTED ON THE WINDOW-SILL OF KING BRAHMADATTA'S CHAMBER.

MAHARAJ, I WANT TO DISCUSS A SECRET PLAN.

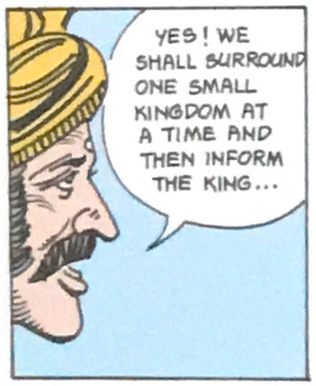
GO AHEAD, MINISTER KEVATTA.

NOT HERE, MAHARAJ! EVEN WALLS ARE SAID TO HAVE EARS...

...LET US GO INTO THE GARDEN.


THE TWO WENT INTO THE ROYAL GARDEN. AUSHADHA'S PARROT FOLLOWED THEM.
WE HAVE BUILT A FAIRLY LARGE ARMY. YOU SHOULD NOW BECOME THE OVERLORD OF JAMBUDVEEPA.
BUT, WE ARE NOT POWERFUL ENOUGH TO ACCOMPLISH THAT.

WE CAN, MAHARAJ! BY DECEIT!
DECEIT?!


YES! WE SHALL SURROUND ONE SMALL KINGDOM AT A TIME AND THEN INFORM THE KING...

...THAT WE WILL SPARE HIS LIFE AND LET HIM RULE HIS KINGDOM IF HE ACCEPTS YOUR OVERLORDSHIP.

THE KING WILL HAVE NO OPTION BUT TO SURRENDER.

...THUS, ONE BY ONE WE SHALL ANNEX ALL THE HUNDRED KINGDOMS WITHOUT SHEDDING A DROP OF OUR BLOOD.

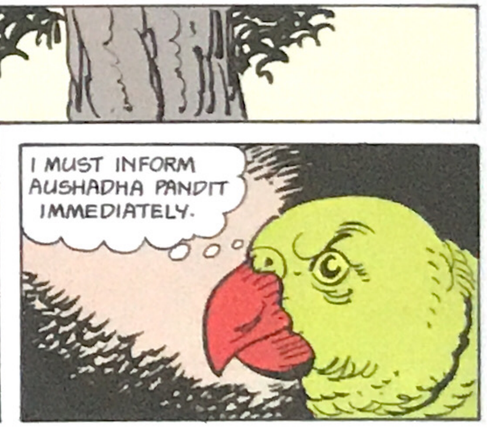
BUT I WILL BE OVERLORD ONLY IN NAME. AS THE KINGS WILL RULE THEIR OWN KINGDOMS.

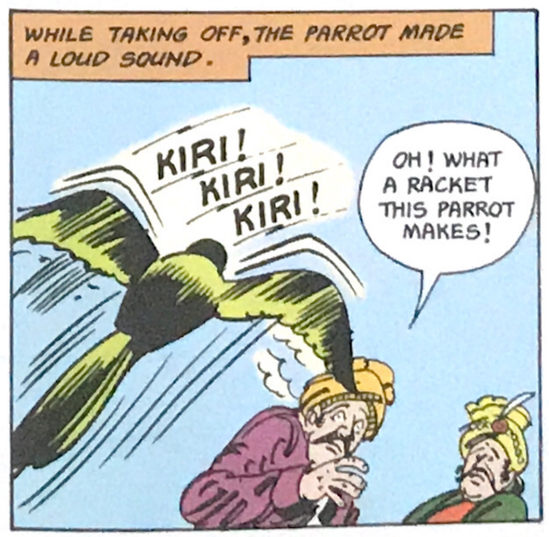
THEY WILL NOT, MAHARAJ! AFTER THE CAMPAIGN IS OVER WE SHALL INVITE THEM TO A FEAST...

...WHERE ALL OF THEM WILL BE POISONED.

RASCAL!

AFTER THE FEAST, NO KING WILL LIVE TO CHALLENGE YOUR THRONE.
EXCELLENT!


I MUST INFORM AUSHADHA PANDIT IMMEDIATELY.


WHILE TAKING OFF, THE PARROT MADE A LOUD SOUND.
KIRI! KIRI! KIRI!
OH! WHAT A RACKET THIS PARROT MAKES!

THE ANGRY PARROT DROPPED HIS EXCRETA ON KEVATTA.
DRAT THAT PARROT.

THE PARROT FLEW STRAIGHT TO AUSHADHA KUMAR. AUSHADHA WAS PERTURBED BY THE INFORMATION.

I CANNOT ALLOW SO MANY KINGS TO DIE...

...I SHALL PROTECT THEM FROM UNTIMELY DEATH. BUT...

... BEFORE THAT I MUST ARRANGE TO PROTECT MY OWN PEOPLE.

AUSHADHA KUMAR MOVED THE CITIZENS FROM THE OUTSKIRTS INTO THE FORTIFIED CITY.

THEN HE STOCKED THE GRANARIES WITH AMPLE QUANTITIES OF FOOD GRAINS.

MEANWHILE, KING BRAHMADATTA MARCHED WITH HIS ARMY TO CARRY OUT THE NEFARIOUS PLAN CONCEIVED BY KEVATTA.

BRAHMADATTA SURROUNDED THE FORT OF A NEIGHBOURING KING, AS PLANNED BY KEVATTA.

NOW WE SHOULD SEND OUR MESSAGE OF PEACE!

SOON, THE MESSENGER REACHED THE ENEMY KING.

ACCEPT OUR FRIENDSHIP AND PROSPER OR INVITE OUR WRATH AND PERISH.

AS ENVISAGED BY KEVATTA, THE ENEMY KING SURRENDERED WITHOUT GIVING FIGHT.

IN SEVEN YEARS, SEVEN MONTHS AND SEVEN DAYS, BRAHMADATTA BECAME THE OVERLORD OF ONE HUNDRED KINGS THROUGH HIS CLEVER SCHEME.

I, KING OF ANGA SURRENDER TO YOU.

I, KING OF VANGA SURRENDER TO YOU.

I, KING OF KALINGA SURRENDER TO YOU.

I, KING OF KASHI SURRENDER TO YOU.

I, KING OF MAGADHA SURRENDER TO YOU.

I, KING OF SHRAVASTI SURRENDER TO YOU.

AUSHADHA KUMAR RECEIVED TIMELY REPORTS OF SURRENDERS OF EACH OF THE HUNDRED KINGS.

KEVATTA IS CRAFTY. BUT I AM READY FOR HIM.

KEVATTA WAS AWARE OF AUSHADHA'S CAPABILITY. SO WHEN ONE DAY KING BRAHMADATTA SUGGESTED—

WE SHOULD NOW TURN TO VAIDEHA. HIS IS THE ONLY KINGDOM NOT UNDER US.

MAHARAJ. VIDEHA IS A VERY SMALL KINGDOM.

...IT WILL BE DEMEANING FOR AN OVERLORD OF A HUNDRED KINGS TO ATTACK A TINY STATE.

ALL RIGHT, BUT WHAT ABOUT THE REMAINING PART OF OUR SCHEME...

...WHEN DO WE GET RID OF THE KINGS?

I SHALL SEND INVITATIONS OF DEATH TO THE KINGS RIGHT NOW.

THE HUNDRED KINGS RECEIVED IDENTICAL MESSAGES.

EMPEROR BRAHMADATTA, THE OVERLORD OF JAMBUDVEEPA, INVITES YOU TO A FEAST TO CELEBRATE HIS DIGVIJAYA.*

WHEN AUSHADHA KUMAR LEARNT THAT THE DEADLY FEAST HAD BEEN FIXED, HE DECIDED TO ACT.

TAKE A HUNDRED TRUSTED WARRIORS DISGUISED AS PANCHALAS...

...ENTER THE VENUE OF THE FEAST A LITTLE BEFORE ITS SCHEDULED TIME...

...AND DESTROY ALL THE FOOD AND DRINKS. BUT BEFORE YOU LEAVE ANNOUNCE YOURSELF AS MEN OF THE KING OF VIDEHA.

THE MEN DID AUSHADHA'S BIDDING.

WHERE IS THE SEAT FOR KING VAIDEHA?

HE IS NOT INVITED.

THAT IS AN INSULT TO OUR KING.

SINCE OUR KING IS NOT INVITED, WE WILL NOT ALLOW ANYONE ELSE TO ENJOY THE FEAST.

* CONQUEST OVER ALL

SO, AUSHADHA KUMAR'S MEN DESTROYED THE POISONED FOOD...

...AND ESCAPED ON SWIFT HORSES.

BRAHMADATTA WAS FURIOUS.

RASCALS! THEY HAVE RUINED MY PLANS.

I SHALL ATTACK MITHILA AND BEHEAD VAIDEHA.

MAHARAJ, IT WILL NOT BE AN EASY TASK...

...MITHILA IS PROTECTED BY AUSHADHA KUMAR.

WHAT CAN HE DO AGAINST THE OVERLORD OF JAMBUDVEEPA?

SO BRAHMADATTA INCITED THE HUNDRED KINGS —

THE KING OF MITHILA HAS INSULTED ALL OF US BY RUINING OUR FEAST.

WE SHALL PUNISH HIM.

YES! WE SHALL KILL HIM AND THEN HAVE OUR FEAST.

ACCOMPANIED BY THE HUNDRED KINGS AND A HUGE ARMY, BRAHMADATTA MARCHED TO MITHILA. KEVATTA WENT WITH BRAHMADATTA SO AS NOT TO DISPLEASE HIS KING.

SOON, BRAHMADATTA LAID A SIEGE TO MITHILA.

OH GOD, BRAHMADATTA WILL STORM MY FORT AND KILL ME.

BUT, AUSHADHA KUMAR, UNAFRAID LIKE A LION, INSPECTED THE SECURITY ARRANGEMENTS. HE THEN REPORTED TO THE KING.

GLORY BE TO KING VAIDEHA!

THE DAYS OF MY GLORY ARE OVER, AUSHADHA. I CAN SEE MY END CLEARLY.

DO NOT FEEL ANXIOUS, MAHARAJ. I HAVE A SOLUTION.

I SHALL SCATTER THE ENEMY JUST AS CROWS ARE DISPERSED WITH A STICK...
...OR JUST AS THE MONKEYS ARE PUT ON THE RUN BY A HANDFUL OF STONES...
...BE RELAXED MAHARAJ, FOR THE ENEMY WILL RUN AWAY LEAVING EVEN THEIR WEAPONS. BEHIND.

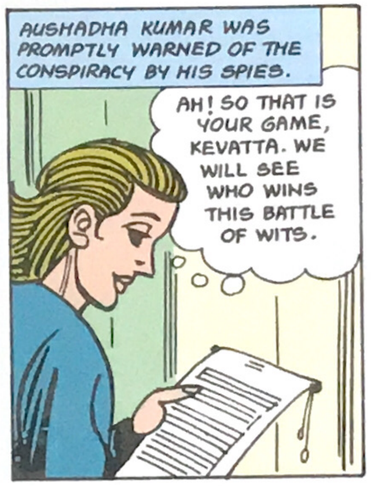
WHILE AUSHADHA KUMAR WAS TRYING TO ALLAY VAIDEHA'S FEARS, BRAHMADATTA LAUNCHED AN ATTACK ON THE FORT.

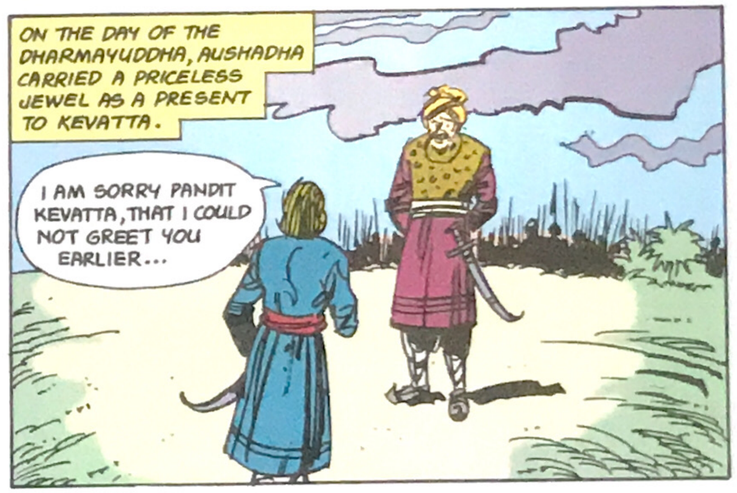
THE APPROACH TO THE FORT WAS MADE DIFFICULT BY THE THREE MOATS AROUND IT.
WHEN THE ENEMY SOLDIERS CAME NEAR THE FORT, VAIDEHA AND SOLDIERS SHOWERED THEM WITH STONES AND OTHER MISSILES...
...AND BRAHMADATTA'S ATTACK FAILED MISERABLY.

WHAT SHALL WE DO? SHALL WE LIFT THE SIEGE AND GO BACK?
NO, THAT WILL MEAN A LOSS OF FACE. YOU CANNOT AFFORD THAT AS THE OVER-LORD OF JAMBU-DVEEPA.
BUT HOW CAN I SAVE MY FACE?
I SHALL USE A TRICK TO GAIN A TOKEN VICTORY.

...VAIDEHA'S CHIEF MINISTER AUSHADHA KUMAR TO MATCH HIS WITS WITH MINE...
...WHOEVER WINS, HIS SIDE WILL BE CONSIDERED VICTORIOUS.

* BATTLE ACCORDING TO DHARMA.


AUSHADHA KUMAR WAS PROMPTLY WARNED OF THE CONSPIRACY BY HIS SPIES.
AH! SO THAT IS YOUR GAME, KEVATTA. WE WILL SEE WHO WINS THIS BATTLE OF WITS.


ON THE DAY OF THE DHARMAYUDDHA, AUSHADHA CARRIED A PRICELESS JEWEL AS A PRESENT TO KEVATTA.
I AM SORRY PANDIT KEVATTA, THAT I COULD NOT GREET YOU EARLIER...

AS SOON AS KEVATTA BENT DOWN, AUSHADHA-KUMAR PLACED HIS HANDS ON KEVATTA'S SHOULDERS AND PRESSED HIS HEAD DOWN ON THE EARTH. THE HEAD STRUCK WITH FORCE AND A DEEP GASH APPEARED ON KEVATTA'S FOREHEAD

AH!

NO! PANDIT KEVATTA, DO NOT TOUCH MY FEET...

...I KNOW, YOU HAVE ADMITTED DEFEAT. BUT I AM MUCH YOUNGER THAN YOU. SO PLEASE DO NOT BOW TO ME. RISE O ACHARYA, RISE!

THEN AUSHADHA WHISPERED TO KEVATTA—

STUPID FOOL! YOU EXPECTED ME TO BOW TO YOU.

AND THEN HE PUSHED KEVATTA AWAY WITH SUCH FORCE THAT KEVATTA FELL DOWN AT A DISTANCE.

AND IMMEDIATELY AT A PRE-ARRANGED SIGNAL AUSHADHA KUMAR'S ARMED SOLDIERS RUSHED OUT OF VAIDEHA'S FORT. KEVATTA RAN AT THE SIGHT OF THE SOLDIERS.

AND SO DID BRAHMADATTA, THE HUNDRED PANIC STRICKEN KINGS AND THEIR SOLDIERS.

KEVATTA HAS BEEN DEFEATED! RUN! RUN!

AS AUSHADHA KUMAR HAD FORETOLD, THE TERRIFIED ENEMY RAN AWAY LEAVING EVEN THEIR WEAPONS BEHIND.

THE WOUND ON KEVATTA'S FOREHEAD LEFT A MARK. THE MARK CONSTANTLY REMINDED KEVATTA OF HIS HUMILIATION.

OH, AUSHADHA KUMAR, I WILL NOT FORGIVE YOU FOR THIS.

FINALLY, KEVATTA HATCHED A SCHEME.

MAHARAJ, I HAVE A PLAN TO AVENGE OUR INSULT.

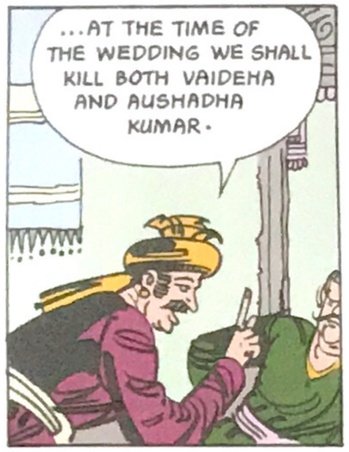
YOUR PLAN DID NOT WORK OUT LAST TIME, KEVATTA.

THIS TIME IT WILL. FOR YOU SHALL OFFER YOUR DAUGHTER TO VAIDEHA.

ARE YOU OUT OF YOUR MIND?

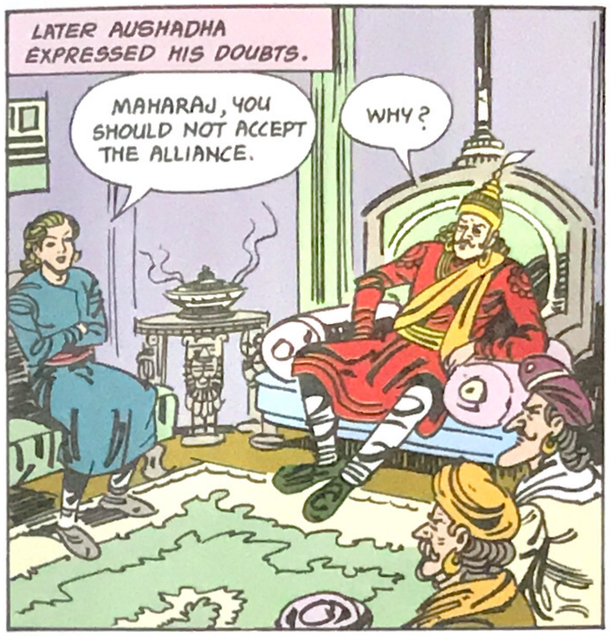
NO, MAHARAJ. THIS SCHEME WILL WORK. BECAUSE...

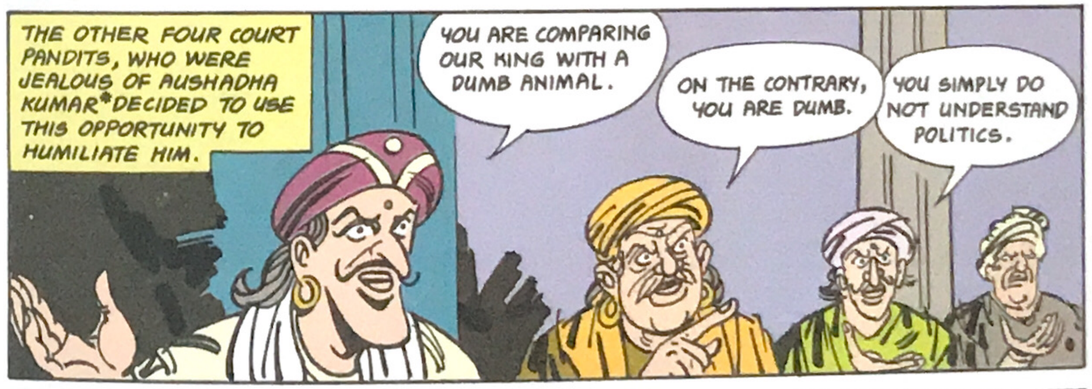
...YOUR DAUGHTER PANCHALA CHANDI IS THE MOST CHARMING MAIDEN IN JAMBUDVEEPA.



KEVATTA PREPARED A METICULOUS PLAN. THE BARDS SENT BY HIM SANG VERSES PRAISING THE ENCHANTING BEAUTY OF THE PANCHALA PRINCESS.

SOON, A BARD HAD AUDIENCE WITH KING VAIDEHA. A PAINTER FROM PANCHALA PRESENTED A PAINTING OF THE PRINCESS TO THE KING.
AH! WHAT EXQUISITE BEAUTY. WHAT IS THE USE OF MY BEING A KING IF I CAN'T MAKE HER MY WIFE.




THE OTHER FOUR COURT PANDITS, WHO WERE JEALOUS OF AUSHADHA KUMAR* DECIDED TO USE THIS OPPORTUNITY TO HUMILIATE HIM.
YOU ARE COMPARING OUR KING WITH A DUMB ANIMAL.
ON THE CONTRARY, YOU ARE DUMB.
YOU SIMPLY DO NOT UNDERSTAND POLITICS.

OUR KING WILL BECOME THE SON-IN-LAW OF THE OVER-LORD OF JAMBUDVEEPA.
AUSHADHA WAS AFRAID THAT THE MARRIAGE WOULD LEAD TO DISASTER BUT HE DID NOT KNOW HOW TO DISSUADE THE KING.

*SEE AMAR CHITRA KATHA NOS. 625

SO WHEN KEVATTA BROUGHT THE MARRIAGE PROPOSAL—

THIS ALLIANCE WILL UNITE THE PEOPLE OF PANCHALA AND VIDEHA.

I'M HAPPY TO ACCEPT THE PROPOSAL.

BRAHMADATTA AND KEVATTA ARE UP TO SOME TRICK.

SO HE SOUGHT INFORMATION FROM HIS SPY IN PANCHALA. PROMPTLY HE RECEIVED A MESSAGE—

CLEAR INFORMATION IS NOT AVAILABLE. KEVATTA AND BRAHMADATTA REGULARLY CONFER IN A CLOSED ROOM. NO OTHER SOUL WAS PRESENT EXCEPT A CAGED MYNAH BIRD.

I MUST SEND MY PARROT AGAIN.

AGAIN THE PARROT FLEW...

...AND REACHED BRAHMADATTA'S PALACE...

GREETINGS, O BEAUTIFUL MYNAH.

GREETINGS, O PARROT! WHERE DO YOU COME FROM? AND WHAT BRINGS YOU HERE?

TO EXTRACT THE VITAL INFORMATION, THE PARROT LIED TO THE MAINAH—

I AM THE ROYAL PARROT OF SHIVI*. I'M LOOKING FOR A SUITABLE BRIDE FOR MYSELF.

WELL, HAVE YOU FOUND ONE?

YES, IF YOU AGREE THEN I HAVE...

WHY SHOULD I AGREE?

BECAUSE MARRIAGE LEADS TO ETERNAL HAPPINESS.

NOT ALWAYS.

WHAT DO YOU MEAN?

THE MARRIAGE OF THE PANCHALA PRINCESS TO KING VAIDEHA, IS GOING TO CAUSE UTTER MISERY.

HOW?

VAIDEHA WILL BE KILLED, WHEN HE COMES FOR THE WEDDING.

* AN ANCIENT KING

WHEN AUSHADHA KUMAR LEARNT OF THE DASTARDLY PLAN HE TRIED TO DISSUADE VAIDEHA AGAIN. BUT VAIDEHA WAS NOT PREPARED TO LISTEN.

YOUR PARROT IS A STUPID BIRD.

BUT, PARDON ME, MAHARAJ.

NO, I'LL NOT DISCUSS THE MATTER ANY FURTHER.

AS YOU WISH, MAHARAJ.

THE KING IS BLINDED BY HIS DESIRES. BUT AS HIS MINISTER IT IS MY DUTY TO PROTECT HIM.

SO, AUSHADHA KUMAR WENT WITH THE ADVANCE PARTY TO THE PANCHALA CAPITAL.

MAHARAJ BRAHMADATTA, I HAVE COME TO MAKE ARRANGEMENTS FOR A GRAND WEDDING.

LET US KNOW IF YOU NEED ANY HELP.

I DO, I NEED A HOUSE AND SOME LAND TO BUILD A LODGE FOR THE WEDDING PARTY.

THAT WILL BE ARRANGED.

SO AUSHADHA WAS GIVEN A HOUSE NEAR THE PALACE TO STAY AND A PIECE OF LAND OUTSIDE THE CITY.

WHY DID YOU ALLOW HIM TO STAY NEAR THE PALACE?

SO THAT WE CAN KEEP A WATCH ON HIM.

AND WHY DID YOU GIVE HIM LAND OUTSIDE THE CITY?

BECAUSE IT WILL BE EASY TO SURROUND AND FINISH THEM OFF THERE.

ONCE AUSHADHA WAS SETTLED, HE STARTED TWO WORKS SIMULTANEOUSLY—THE CONSTRUCTION OF A PALATIAL HOUSE OUTSIDE THE CITY...

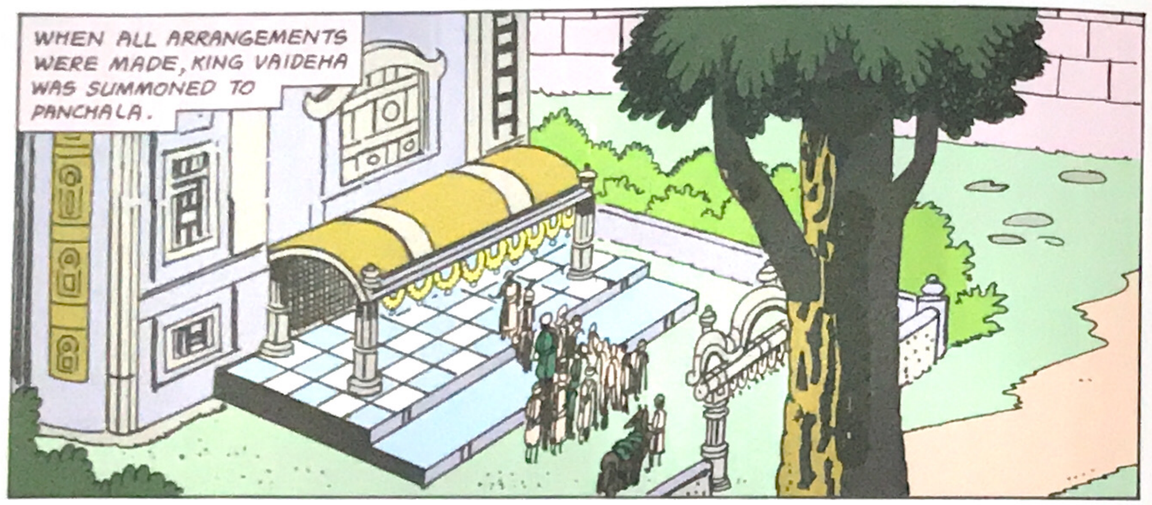
...AND THE DIGGING OF A TUNNEL FROM THE HOUSE WHERE HE WAS STAYING.

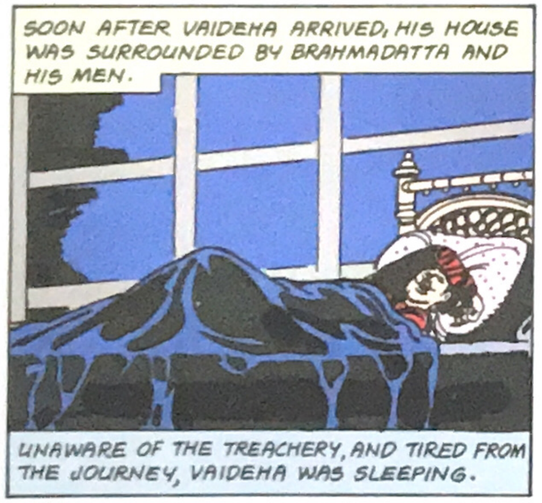
THE TUNNEL WILL HAVE TWO OUTLETS—ONE IN THE HOUSE THAT WE ARE BUILDING...

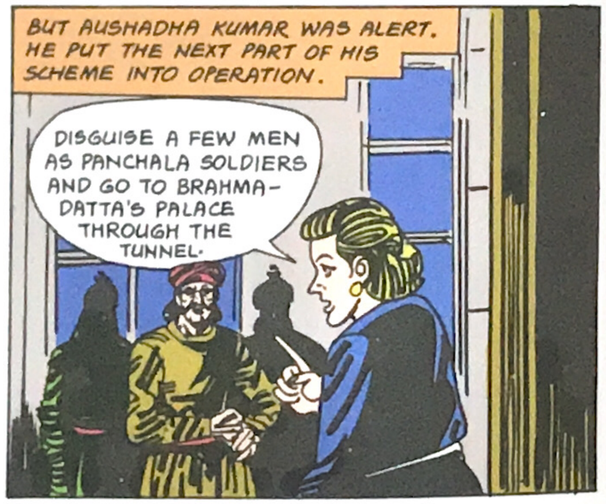
...AND THE OTHER NEAR THE RIVER.

SOON, ONE END OF THE TUNNEL OPENED IN THE NEW HOUSE...

...AND THE OTHER IN THICK BUSHES NEAR THE RIVER.

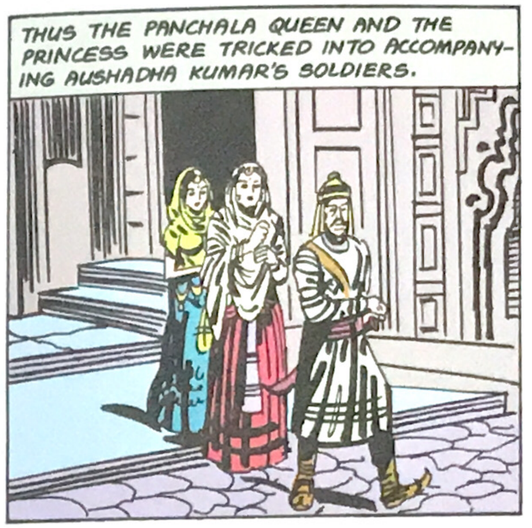

WHEN ALL ARRANGEMENTS WERE MADE, KING VAIDEHA WAS SUMMONED TO PANCHALA.

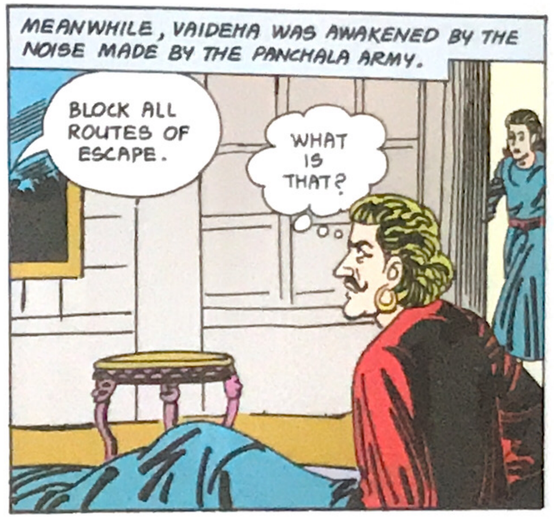

SOON AFTER VAIDEHA ARRIVED, HIS HOUSE WAS SURROUNDED BY BRAHMADATTA AND HIS MEN.
UNAWARE OF THE TREACHERY, AND TIRED FROM THE JOURNEY, VAIDEHA WAS SLEEPING.


BUT AUSHADHA KUMAR WAS ALERT. HE PUT THE NEXT PART OF HIS SCHEME INTO OPERATION.
DISGUISE A FEW MEN AS PANCHALA SOLDIERS AND GO TO BRAHMA-DATTA'S PALACE THROUGH THE TUNNEL.

AS INSTRUCTED THE MEN WENT TO BRAHMADATTA'S PALACE AND ADDRESSED HIS QUEEN.
O QUEEN! VAIDEHA HAS BEEN KILLED...

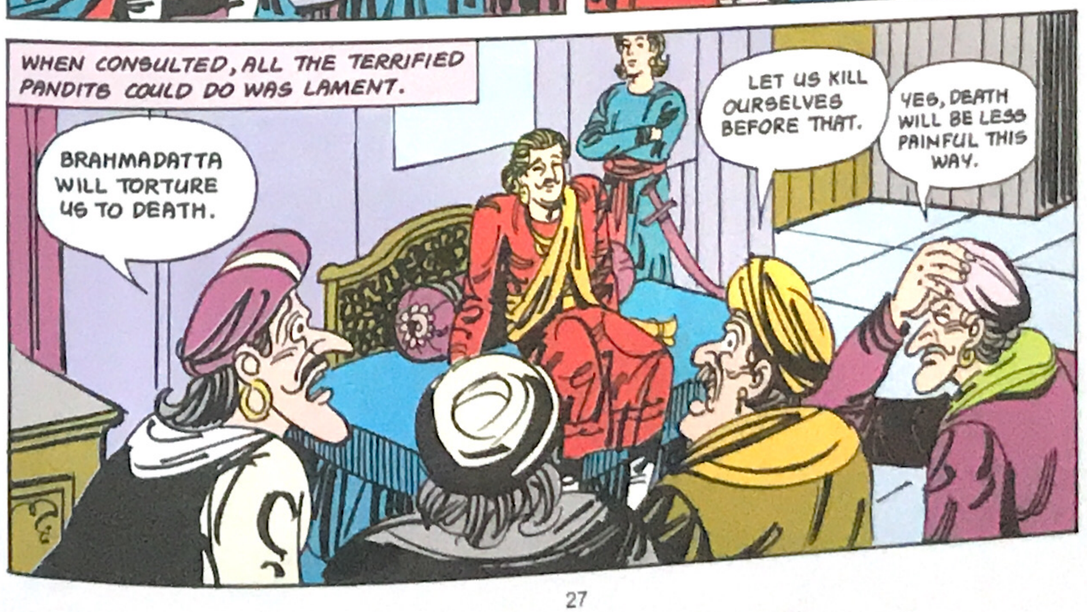
...KING BRAHMADATTA HAS ASKED ALL OF YOU TO JOIN HIM IN THE FEAST CELEBRATING THIS VICTORY.


THUS THE PANCHALA QUEEN AND THE PRINCESS WERE TRICKED INTO ACCOMPANY-ING AUSHADHA KUMAR'S SOLDIERS.


MEANWHILE, VAIDEHA WAS AWAKENED BY THE NOISE MADE BY THE PANCHALA ARMY.
BLOCK ALL ROUTES OF ESCAPE.
WHAT IS THAT?

OH GOD, WE SHALL ALL BE BUTCHERED NOW.
WHEN DESIRES CLOUD THE SENSES THEY LEAD TO MISERY, MAHARAJ!

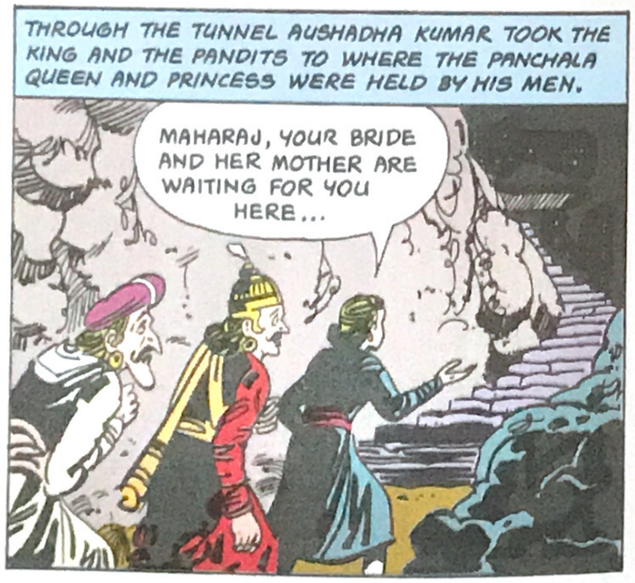
WHAT SHALL WE DO NOW?
SENAKA AND OTHER PANDITS UNDERSTAND POLITICS BETTER THAN I DO, MAHARAJ. LET THEM GUIDE YOU.


WHEN CONSULTED, ALL THE TERRIFIED PANDITS COULD DO WAS LAMENT.
BRAHMADATTA WILL TORTURE US TO DEATH.
LET US KILL OURSELVES BEFORE THAT.
YES, DEATH WILL BE LESS PAINFUL THIS WAY.

OH, GOD! IS THERE NO WAY TO ESCAPE?
THE KING IS TERRIFIED... I SHOULD REASSURE HIM.

THE WAY TO SAFETY LIES UNDER THE GROUND, MAHARAJ.
UNDERGROUND!

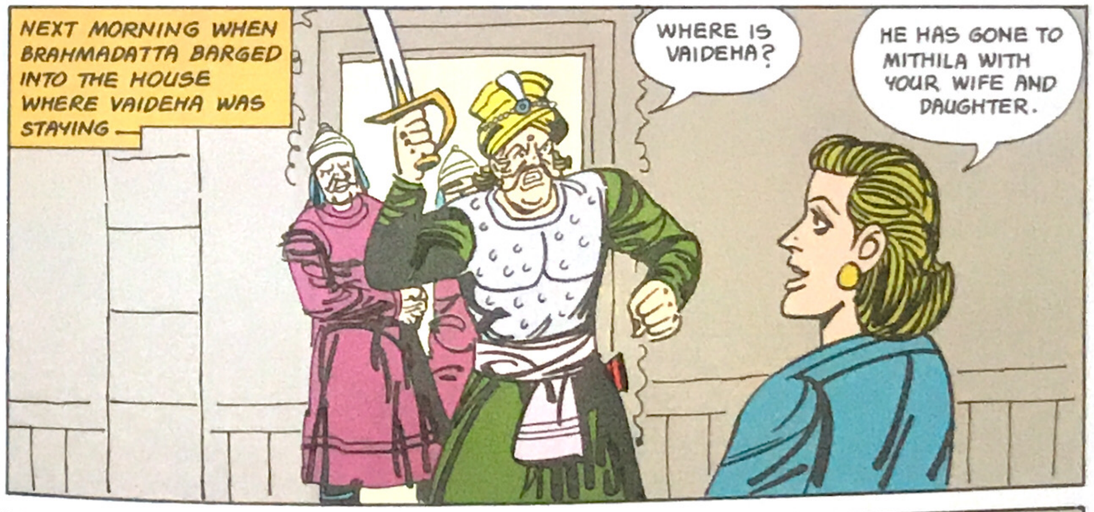
YES! PLEASE STEP THIS WAY.


THROUGH THE TUNNEL AUSHADHA KUMAR TOOK THE KING AND THE PANDITS TO WHERE THE PANCHALA QUEEN AND PRINCESS WERE HELD BY HIS MEN.
MAHARAJ, YOUR BRIDE AND HER MOTHER ARE WAITING FOR YOU HERE...

...PLEASE TAKE THEM WITH YOU TO MITHILA. THE BOATS ARE WAITING.

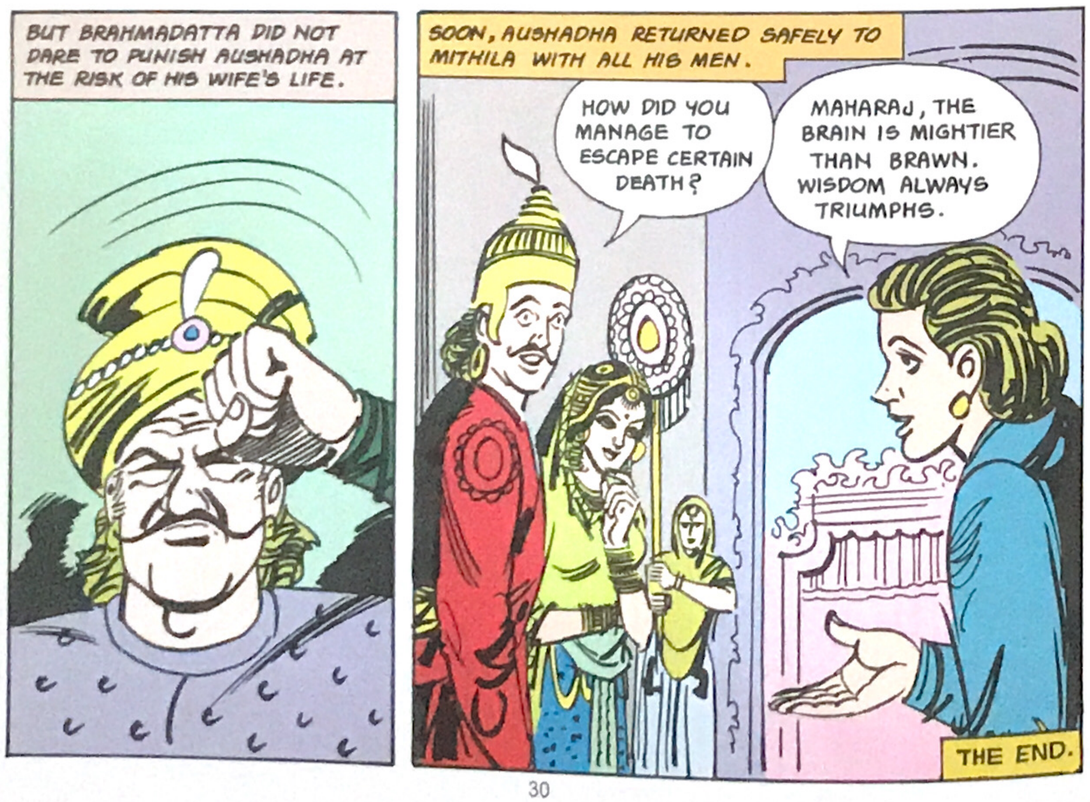
A MUCH RELIEVED VAIDEHA RUSHED TOWARDS THE BOAT.
COME ON AUSHADHA, LET US NOT WASTE TIME.
I AM NOT COMING, MAHARAJ...

...MY MEN ARE TRAPPED BY THE ENEMY. I CANNOT LEAVE THEM BEHIND.


NEXT MORNING WHEN BRAHMADATTA BARGED INTO THE HOUSE WHERE VAIDEHA WAS STAYING
WHERE IS VAIDEHA?
HE HAS GONE TO MITHILA WITH YOUR WIFE AND DAUGHTER.

WHEN BRAHMADATTA LEARNT THE TRUTH HE BECAME LIVID WITH RAGE.
CUT OFF HIS NOSE, CUT OFF HIS HANDS, CUT OFF HIS HEAD.
THINK CAREFULLY BEFORE YOU DO ANYTHING RASH, O KING...

...BECAUSE, IF YOU CUT OFF MY NOSE, MY KING WILL CUT OFF THE NOSE OF YOUR QUEEN.


BUT BRAHMADATTA DID NOT DARE TO PUNISH AUSHADHA AT THE RISK OF HIS WIFE'S LIFE.
SOON, AUSHADHA RETURNED SAFELY TO MITHILA WITH ALL HIS MEN.
HOW DID YOU MANAGE TO ESCAPE CERTAIN DEATH?
MAHARAJ, THE BRAIN IS MIGHTIER THAN BRAWN. WISDOM ALWAYS TRIUMPHS.
THE END.

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